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WENDELL PHILLIPS CENTENARY 1911

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WENDELL PHILLIPS

A Centennial Oration

Delivered at Park Street Church, Boston
November 28, 1911

By

Wendell Phillips Stafford

Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia

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WENDELL PHILLIPS

Born November 29, 1811

Died February 2, 1884

Gift
Association
FEB 23 1912

The Centenary of the Birth of Wendell Phillips was impressively celebrated by a public meeting at Park Street Church, Boston, on the evening of November 28, 1911, under the auspices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Moorfield Storey, Esq., President of the Association, occupied the chair and introduced the orator of the occasion, Judge Stafford, of Washington, District of Columbia, a namesake of Mr. Phillips, and peculiarly qualified by inheritance, training, and sympathy to do justice to his subject. His address, delivered with rare eloquence and charm, made a profound impression on his audience, and was felt to be so noble and adequate a tribute to the great reformer that there has been an urgent request for its publication. The generosity of friends has made this possible, and will be gratefully appreciated by all to whom the opportunity of reading the oration is thus afforded. It has seemed fitting, in this connection, to reprint from the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which it first appeared more than twenty years ago, Judge Stafford's fine poem on Wendell Phillips, which has an equal claim to preservation with his masterly oration.

To Judge Stafford himself the Association is deeply indebted for his generously rendered service on this occasion, and for his steadfast sympathy and support in the work to which it is dedicated.

WENDELL PHILLIPS

A hundred years ago tomorrow Wendell Phillips was born. We have assembled tonight to pay our tribute to his memory—one of the purest patriots, one of the soundest and farthest-sighted statesmen, probably the greatest orator, and certainly the greatest tribune of the people, the New World has produced. In other cities men are doing the same. But we are happy above all the rest in the place of our meeting, the city of his birth. This house, indeed, is barren of association with the reform movements to which his life was devoted, if we except the fact that here in 1829 Garrison made his first important anti-slavery address. Here, to paraphrase his own words, he seized the trump and blew the first of those jarring blasts by which the land was shaken as a leaf is shaken by the wind. Its doors were closed to anti-slavery meetings from that hour. Yet here we do stand at the center of the scene where Wendell Phillips's life of conflict and peril was passed. Yonder on Beacon Street he was born. Down there on Common Street he died. Over there in Essex Street he lived for forty years. In the burial ground beside us his body lay interred for two years before its removal to the green

shades of Milton. Faneuil Hall, the scene of his first triumph and of many later ones, is near at hand, and only across the street are Tremont Temple and Music Hall, where, just before and during the war, his greatest speeches were delivered, and whence the ever attentive mobs escorted him to his door and received his stately, "Good night, gentlemen." Yes, these are the very streets he loved inexpressibly, over which his mother held up tenderly his baby feet, and which he swore, if God granted him time enough, he would make too pure to bear the footsteps of a slave.

Wendell Phillips was a born reformer. He could never have been satisfied with anything short of perfection. He contended with the evils of his time, but if he were living in our day he would be at war with the evils that surround us now; and if he should return to earth a thousand years hence, it would be the same. As long as anything better remained to be achieved, as long as injustice held any foothold on the globe, he would still be crying "forward," and assailing the powers of darkness with all his old-time eloquence and zeal.

Added to that, he was, from deliberate and profound conviction, an agitator. He believed that in a free country all real progress must be brought about by agitation. He accepted Sir Robert Peel's definition of the word, "the marshaling of the conscience of a nation to mould its laws." But his faith in the method went even deeper than that. Not only was it

the sole means by which reforms could be carried through, it was the only means by which governments could be kept free. A people that is satisfied with the institutions it has gained, that worships the past and refuses to go forward to larger freedom, has already ceased to be free. In his own eloquent words, "If the Alps, piled in cold and still sublimity, be the emblem of despotism, the ever restless ocean is ours, only pure because never still."

In the widest sense of the word he was a democrat. He believed in the people. "The people mean right," he said, "and in the end they will have the right." He saw that it is never for the interest of the masses that injustice should be done. Hence, while it is not safe to trust any class by itself, it is safe to trust the people. Not any one race, not either sex, but all races, both sexes, all sorts and conditions of men, good and bad, learned and ignorant, rich and poor. He would give the suffrage to all. He would put the ballot even in the hands of the most ignorant, and then turn to the state and say: "Here is one of your rulers. Now see to it that he is educated, or he may give you trouble." He believed in universal suffrage because it took bonds of the rich and powerful to do their duty by the weak and poor.

Himself an aristocrat by birth and breeding, he became such a tribune of the people as Rome never saw. If you look only at the surface of things, his career is full of contradictions. Here was a man of purest

Anglo-Saxon lineage spending his life in the service of the dusky sons of Africa; and not only that, but claiming for the African race, "by virtue of its courage, its purpose, and its endurance, a place as near to the Saxon as any other blood in history." Here was a devout Christian, adhering to the creed of his fathers, yet spurning the nominal Christianity of his day, coming out from it and shaking the very dust of its threshold from his feet. Here was a man dowered with all the gifts of intellect, all the graces of person and of speech, "formed," as Emerson declared, "for the galleries of Europe," and able, if he would only stretch out his hand, to take the highest prizes of public life, refusing every bribe, turning his back on all the world had to offer, and casting in his lot with a handful of fanatics. Trained for the bar and preeminently fitted for success in the forum, he left the courthouse, locked his office door, and repudiated his oath to support the Constitution. Deeply interested in politics, and master, as few men were, of political questions, he never held an office, he never threw a ballot, he refused to swear allegiance to a government that required him to lend his hand to the maintenance of human bondage. Devoting himself for thirty years to the overthrow of slavery, and living to see his object accomplished in the midst of a convulsion that left the anti-slavery sentiment dominant in the land and made the once-despised name of Abolitionist a passport to public favor, he refused to ride

into political office on the crest of the victorious wave —left others to celebrate the victory, while he pushed on, unhesitating and almost alone, to new battlefields for suffering humanity. It is plain we must go beneath the surface if we would understand a man like this.

Reformer, agitator, democrat, tribune of the people, he was something more: he was a prophet. He saw with open eye the secret of the world. He saw, under every disguise and through all confusion, the clear working of the eternal will. God reigns. Falsehood and wrong are only for a day—justice is for the ages. In the serene confidence of that vision he rebuked the mighty oppressors of his time and cheered the hearts of the downtrodden and the weak. "The spirit of the Lord was upon him, because he had anointed him to preach good tidings to the poor. He had sent him to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that were bound." We shall try in vain to understand the Abolition movement unless we recognize from the beginning that it was a religious movement. It was a revival of original, primitive Christianity, and the application of those principles to the United States of America in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. These men actually believed in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They really remembered those that were in bonds as bound with them. They took Christ's word for it that what they did unto

these, the very least of His brethren, they were doing unto Him. It was very simple. How should *we* like to be slaves? How should *we* like to have our children sold and torn from our arms? How should *we* like to see our daughters ravished, our fathers and mothers beaten till they could not feel? How should *we* like to be goods and chattels, with no rights our masters were bound to respect? Well, that was the system of human slavery that did exist in the United States. The Abolitionists were never too hard upon that system; they never gave it any harsher name than it deserved; and for the very simple reason that it would have been impossible. They used all the words within their reach, but the English language had no words black enough to paint it or hot enough to damn it. Unless words had been scorpions and sentences had been thunderbolts, it would have been impossible for human speech to denounce it as it deserved.

The Constitution of the United States! We speak the words today with affection and with awe, and well we may, for it gathers up and bears in its majestic bosom the liberties of all; and wherever today, under the Stars and Stripes, the meanest child of man is denied the equal protection of the law, there is an infamous and treasonous violation of the Constitution. But I am speaking for the moment of 1835. I am taking you back to a time when obedience to the Golden Rule was treason, when the Constitution was

not the surety of freedom but the guaranty of bondage, when the snake slavery had its loathsome, slimy nest in the very hollow of its shield. I speak of a time when if you swore to support the Constitution you swore that you would help strike down every black man who had the courage to fight for a liberty that belonged to him as much as yours belonged to you—when, if you swore to it, you promised to turn the trembling, starving fugitive from your door, or bind him and send him back to unpaid labor, to torture, or to death. That was the Constitution the Abolitionists refused to lend their hands to. Tested by the teachings of Jesus Christ, were they wrong or were they right when they refused? Did they go too far when they adopted the words of the Hebrew prophet and said, it is "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell"? Take the case of George Latimer. He was seized in Boston as a slave. He had escaped from Norfolk, Virginia, with his wife and children and was living here. They took him on a false charge of theft. He was brought before Chief Justice Shaw, in the state court, was denied a jury trial, and sent back to Judge Story's court, the United States Court, where he lay under the beak and talons of the American eagle; from that court he was sent back to slavery. At the bidding of the Constitution, lawyer, trader, and priest had joined hands to sacrifice the victim. There was a vast meeting in Faneuil Hall on the Sunday night before he was condemned. Stand-

ing before the furious mob that had just howled down one speaker, Wendell Phillips said: "We presume to believe the Bible outweighs the Statute Book. When I look upon these crowded thousands, and see them trample on their consciences and the rights of their fellowmen at the bidding of a piece of parchment, I say my *curse* be on the Constitution of these United States!"

The Abolitionists had not come to that extreme position willingly or in a moment. They were driven to it by the inexorable logic of events. Garrison began his crusade by endeavoring to enlist the Church. He was nothing but a boy, without friends, without money, without prestige, without even a press to print his paper on. He turned to one after another of the natural leaders of the time, and besought *them* to champion the cause. One after another they all refused. Left alone, he said, "If no one else will assail this gigantic system of crime, I must do it!" And he did. He was thrown into jail; assassins lay in wait for his life; sovereign states set a price upon his head; but he kept on, making his appeal to the conscience of the American people to wash their hands of the sin. Then he found he had aroused the hostility of the very forces he had looked to for support. Not only would they not lead themselves, they would not suffer another to go forward. They turned upon *him*. Pulpit and press, traders and statesmen, college presidents—all the recognized leadership of the

time cast him out and strove to put him to silence. Not content with this, they went on to defend the institution itself. The Church apologized for it; welcomed slaveholders to its communion table; opened its pulpit to men-stealers. Merchants said, "You must not attack slavery, it will ruin trade!" Politicians said, "If you breathe a word about it, you will break up the Union." The press said, "Men who talk like that ought to be mobbed." The pulpit murmured "Amen," and confirmed its pious approval with a text. Bishops wrote books to prove that God had always intended the black race to be slaves; and many thought it doubtful whether they had any souls at all.

For half a century the South had been in the saddle. It had furnished the political leaders of the nation. The North, meanwhile, had turned to the making of money and the development of the land. All the North asked was to be let alone, that it might continue to pile up its dollars. What *should* the Abolitionists have done? If they sat down under the threats of the slave power, the liberty to speak and print was lost. It was not now a question whether the slaves of the South should be set free—it was whether the free men of the North should be made slaves. Should they file their tongues to silence upon the gravest moral question of the age at the bidding of false priests, hucksters, and demagogues? Thank God, they said, No! We owe it to them that we have

free speech today. Even Channing acknowledged this. They looked about them and took their bearings. Their fathers had formed this Union and bound it to slavery. Should they submit to it as a necessary evil in the hope that some day the Constitution might be amended and slavery removed? They were confronted by the fact that slavery was on the increase —that the South was determined to make it perpetual, that the North submitted, and that the powers dominant in Church and State forbade even a peaceable discussion of the question. They made up their minds that somebody must move. They saw that responsibility for the Union, and consequently for slavery, rested on each and every one. They refused to carry that responsibility any longer. They "came out." They appealed to all men to come out with them, to form a new Union of free states, parting peaceably from the states that were determined to remain slave. Their course was radical. Yes, it was an appeal to the ancient, sacred right of revolution. But mark this—the changes required were changes that could be brought about only by revolution. The South refusing to abolish slavery, it was impossible for the North to do so by amending the Constitution. When the change finally came, it came by way of revolution. Not, indeed, the peaceable revolution the Abolitionists proposed, but the awful revolution of war. The bloody sequel showed that they were right. They approached the question like statesmen. They

handled it with plain, unanswerable logic. They were the only party at the North that did meet the question squarely. At the South there was another party that met it with equal boldness and directness, asserting that slavery was right—the party of secession. They were the only consistent parties in the country. There never was any real union between the slave states and the free. The only approach to it was when the North was utterly subservient to the South, that is, when the so-called free states were really slave states like the rest. Long before Seward had coined his famous phrase, "the irrepressible conflict," long before Lincoln had declared that "a house divided against itself cannot stand," yes, a quarter of a century before either of those utterances, the same truth had fallen upon deaf ears from the lips of Garrison and his fellows. If to discern the true nature of the problem and foresee in a large way the solution that must be found, while choosing the only means that can secure the object—if this is to be a statesman, then the right of the Abolitionist to that title is beyond doubt or cavil. With unquestioning faith in the justice of his cause, with unclouded sight of the truth of his position, he took the country up by its four corners and shook it with a tempest of moral power. Mobs were the proof of his evangel. The land was stagnant with apathy, and where the wind and lightning of the word came there was tumult and disturbance. Mobs were bad enough, but they were a thou-

sand times better than the sluggish calm that preceded them, the languor and torpor of spiritual death.

If we deny the name of statesman to the Abolitionist, to whom of his time should we grant it? Should it be to the smooth compromisers, like Clay, who spread the thin batter of mutual concession over the rumbling volcano of irreconcilable forces? Should it be to those valorous Northerners who warned the South that the annexation of Texas would be the dissolution of the Union, and then, when Texas was annexed, ate their own words and made haste to take the hero of that infernal war for their Chief Magistrate? Should it be to a man like Webster, so far behind his age or so deaf to the voices of humanity that he actually thought the consciences of men could be stifled, and that this mighty movement, which he sneeringly nicknamed "the rub-a-dub agitation," could be put down? Should it be to leaders like Birney, and Gerrit Smith for a season, who tried to make themselves believe that the Constitution was an anti-slavery document? Should it be to the men who formed the Republican party with the avowed purpose of stopping the extension of slavery, of abolishing it where the national government had the power, and of putting it, as Lincoln said, "where the public mind might rest in the belief that it was in the course of ultimate extinction," and yet, when secession was upon them, went down on their knees, in Congress, and offered to adopt a Constitutional amendment

making it impossible ever to get rid of slavery? Should it be to the men in office in the days of the great rebellion, who finally adopted emancipation at the point of the bayonet, as the last and only means of saving the Union, by bringing to their side the sympathy of the civilized world and the tardy succor of an outraged and alienated God? Or should it not rather be accorded to the men who saw and declared in 1835 what, thirty years later, all men were obliged to see? They did not need the Dred Scott decision to show them the plan and purpose of the slave power. They understood it from the first.

I have no quarrel with you if you only mean to make excuses for the millions who never answered to their call, who could never rise to the height on which they stood. The saving remnant is always, in all ages, only a remnant—"a few leaves upon the topmost bough." But when you deny them the claim to statesmanship—when you imply that the measures they proposed were impracticable and vain—I ask you to point to the popular statesman of their time who proposed anything that had a feather's weight against the mighty tempest that swept all selfish calculations to the Gehenna of civil war. What did the Abolitionists propose? They demanded emancipation—immediate and unconditional. You came to it at last, not willingly, not through conversion, but when God had driven you to it with the lash of rebellion and defeat. It was only the old excuse—Let

us do evil that good may come. Men could not trust God to make the right successful. They must go into partnership with the devil to do the Lord's work. The Abolitionists, whose faith in God has never been surpassed, who believed in doing right and leaving it to Him who made it right to see that justice was expedient—they were the infidels and heretics of the time. "If I die before emancipation," said Phillips, "write this for my epitaph, 'Here lies Wendell Phillips, infidel to a church that defended human slavery —traitor to a government that was only an organized conspiracy against the rights of men.'"

The movement begun by Garrison had proceeded for seven years before his most powerful assistant came to his side. Whatever may have been the immediate occasion of his coming, he owed his anti-slavery birth, as he always declared, to Garrison. "For myself," said he, "no words can adequately tell the measureless debt I owe him—the intellectual and moral life he opened to me." In the principles of the two men touching their life work there was never any, the slightest, antagonism or division. Phillips, from the beginning to the end, was a Garrisonian Abolitionist. To the service of the cause he brought his own rich and peculiar gifts. First of all, his character, his personality. Puritan of the Puritans; son of the best blood of Boston; trained by Latin School, Harvard College, and the law teachers of Cambridge; handsome, athletic, accomplished; possessed of a singular

personal charm, the talismanic gift that moved Emerson to say, "I would give a thousand shekels for that man's secret"; endowed with such eloquence a Greek would have said that on his lips the Attic bees had swarmed and left their sweetness; yet with a rapier-like thrust, skillful to disarm his antagonist or pierce the thickest armor, so that Mrs. Stowe said truly, "In invective no American or English orator has ever surpassed him"; an easy mastery over every sort of audience; breadth of view and statesmanlike comprehension of the issue; unflinching courage, undrooping hope, unfaltering confidence in the triumph of the truth and the mighty power of God. Such was the man who closed his office door, recanted his oath of allegiance, and made himself an alien in the city of his fathers, to join the Abolitionists. It was the only step he could have taken and remained true to his blood, his traditions, and the voice of conscience that had led him from the cradle. It was a happy choice. It gave him the fellowship of the noblest spirits of his time. Do you think he ever missed the attentions of the class he went out from? If you imagine that he cast one wistful look behind him, you have yet to gain your first glimpse into the character of Wendell Phillips. What he said of Garrison may be said of him, "There were not arrows enough in the whole quiver of the Church and State to wound him." Think what it must have meant to the little band of reformers arrayed against a hostile nation, whom even John

Quincy Adams could describe as "a small, shallow, enthusiastic party," to find in their midst the most eloquent man who spoke the English language, whom Henry Ward Beecher pronounced "the most admirable orator in the world." Said Emerson, "Strange as it may seem, it is true, the world owes the finest orator of the age to the movement that enlisted Wendell Phillips in the service of the poor, despised slave"; and in his journal he added, "Everett and Webster ought to go to school to him." Now let the South bring on her Randolphs, her Haynes, her Breckenridges! They shall meet a power of speech as much more withering than theirs as the fire of the prophets is fiercer than the temper of the mob. There was need of such a voice. "Webster," said Phillips, "had taught the North the 'bated breath and crouching of a slave. It needed that we should exhaust even the Saxon vocabulary of scorn, to fitly utter the haughty and righteous contempt that honest men had for men-stealers. Only in that way could we wake the North to self-respect, or teach the South that at length she had met her equal, if not her master."

While John Brown was on trial, Phillips spoke at Plymouth Church, from Beecher's pulpit, on "The Lesson of the Hour." "Virginia," said he, "is a pirate ship, and John Brown sails the seas the Lord High Admiral of the Almighty, with his commission to sink every pirate he meets on God's ocean of the nineteenth century. I mean literally and exactly what

I say. One on God's side is a majority. Virginia is only another Algiers. The barbarous horde who gag each other, imprison women for teaching children to read, prohibit the Bible, sell men on the auction block, abolish marriage, condemn one-half their women to prostitution, and devote themselves to the breeding of human beings for sale, is only a larger and a blacker Algiers. John Brown has twice as much right to hang Governor Wise as Governor Wise has to hang him." Here burst on the speaker a tempest of cheers and hisses. The silver voice went on, "You see I am talking of that absolute essence of things which lives in the sight of the Eternal and the Infinite, not as men judge it in the rotten morals of the nineteenth century among a herd of states that calls itself an empire because it raises cotton and sells slaves!"

The Abolitionists were right in charging the responsibility for slavery upon the North. "Northern opinion," said Phillips, "the weight of Northern power, is the real slaveholder of America." Edward Everett, on the floor of Congress, declared himself ready to shoulder his musket to put down the first slave-rising. Do you wonder that Randolph of Roanoke boasted, "We do not rule the North by our Southern black slaves but by your Northern white ones"? The task before the Abolitionists was to wake the North to its duty, to give it no rest or peace until it should withdraw the only power that made slavery possible upon this continent. By 1860 the North

had been roused, and was beginning to withdraw its power. The South saw the handwriting on the wall. "For the first time in our history," said Phillips, "the slave has elected a President of the United States." It was exactly so. The slave question, like Aaron's rod, had devoured all other political issues and held the stage alone. True to his teachings of twenty years, Phillips urged the acknowledgment of secession and the peaceable separation of the states. But neither to Phillips nor to any other prophet had it been given to divine the depth and intensity of Northern sentiment that clung around the flag. When the Stars and Stripes fell from Sumter and the multitudinous North leaped as one man to avenge it, the Abolitionists saw that there would be no disunion, that the old Union had been swept away forever, and that the new Union would be free. Only the winter before, Phillips had spoken in Music Hall at the peril of his life, facing many a murderous pistol in his Sunday congregation, and had gone down to his house in Essex Street followed by thousands of angry men. Now he spoke from the same platform, but, "for the first time in his anti-slavery life, he spoke under the Stars and Stripes, and welcomed the tread of Massachusetts men marshaled for war." He hailed that sublime rally of a great people to the defence of the national honor, "a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man from sleep and shaking her invincible locks." There had been nothing to

match it since that night when the beacons blazed from Dover to Carlisle and, between sunset and sunrise, all England rose to hurl back the Armada. "Today," said he, "the slave thanks God for a sight of this banner and counts it the pledge of his redemption. Hitherto it may have meant what you thought or what I did; today it means sovereignty and justice." Then his lips were touched by a live coal from the altar, and he burst into prophecy: "Years hence, when the smoke of the conflict has cleared away, the world will see under our banner all tongues, all creeds, all races one brotherhood, and on the banks of the Potomac the genius of Liberty robed in light, four and thirty stars for her diadem, broken chains under her feet, and an olive branch in her right hand."

It was one of the happiest coincidences in history that the anti-slavery cause should have culminated during the very years that saw Wendell Phillips in the full maturity of his splendid powers. When the rebellion began, he was fifty years of age. For more than twenty years he had been discussing the slave question in all its bearings. He had studied and pondered it in all its phases. Every weapon in his arsenal was bright with service and ready for instant use. His armor had been hardened by blows. His speech had acquired its perfection of form and was now to be charged with unexampled force. In 1861, as Moncure Conway has justly recorded, he delivered the greatest speeches that ever have been heard in Amer-

ica. No man saw more clearly that the war could never be won and the Union established except on the basis of freedom. The North might indeed overpower her adversary, but she could never make a Union between freedom and slavery. This was the burden of the prophet during those four long years, years of the warrior, filled with "confusèd noise and garments rolled in blood," "with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms." It was his mission to rouse the powerful and populous North till it cried as with a single voice, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto *all* the inhabitants thereof." In the nature of things it is impossible to separate and weigh the influence of any one man in the formation of public opinion, that subtle, all-pervasive force which,

> "Like the air,
> Is seldom heard but when it speaks in thunder";

but that there was in all that tremendous period no clearer or more potent voice, the Muse of History will yet affirm.

When slavery had been abolished he was too deeply concerned with the dangers that lay ahead to join in the cheers of victory. He knew that the old hatred of the Negro would find new ways to work against him. He would not halt to hang up wreaths and trophies or to build monuments. He girded up his loins and pushed on to fight for enfranchisement. He was for taking advantage of the sentiment for freedom and

equality while it lasted. He struck while the iron was hot. He worked while it was yet day, knowing that the night was coming wherein no man could work. From 1865 to 1870, the most alert and strenuous years of his life, he toiled night and day for the principle that was finally embodied in the Fifteenth Amendment. To him more than to any other man, perhaps more than to all other men, its adoption was due. He was right. The night has succeeded to the glorious day that gave us the three great amendments, worthy to be written in letters of gold beside the Petition of Right and Magna Charta. The iron that was heated seven times hot in the furnace of battle was happily hammered, before it was too late, into the forms that cannot easily be changed. But the glow is gone. A new generation has come upon the scene. Selfishness, prejudice, the old spirit of caste, are doing their work; and the people that received the tables of stone, from the mount that burned with fire and shook with the thunders of Jehovah, has turned to the worship of the golden calf, and is taking its pleasure at the banquet. All this Phillips foresaw and foretold. Today not a state of the old Confederacy records the Negro's vote. The Fifteenth Amendment is sneered at by millions at the North as the greatest blunder of the age. Today law journals publish labored articles to prove the amendment void. And yet what *is* the fifteenth amendment? What does it declare? Merely this, that a man's right to vote shall not depend upon his

color or his race. The South is as free as ever to make the right depend upon any reasonable test that can be applied to black and white alike, education, property, what she will. Why need she resort to miserable subterfuges to let in her poor, ignorant, and vicious whites, while she excludes even the virtuous, the learned, and prosperous among the blacks? Is this the courage, is this the sense of fairness, of the Anglo-Saxon race?

The black race, in less than fifty years of freedom, has justified every claim of the Abolitionists. It has shown itself brave in battle, faithful in peace, eager to learn, capable of acquiring and controlling wealth, and able to produce noble and far-sighted leaders of its own blood. In spite of race prejudice and political betrayal, it has got its feet on the solid ground of material well-being and is reaching out its hands with slow, patient, but irresistible power to the great prizes of the world of effort and ideas. Its progress during the last half-century will be one of the marvels of history. Every man who loves justice or humanity must rejoice at such a sight. We who have united to demand of the American people the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every child born under the flag, and who are resolved never to rest until those rights have been secured in fact as well as in name—we have reason to believe that the master spirits of the earlier crusade are with us now. As those who fought by Lake Regillus, in the old days

of Rome, saw riding on their right the Great Twin Brethren in snow-white coats of mail, and knew that

> "The gods who live forever
> Were on Rome's side that day,"

so in every charge we make against the forces of oppression we have a right to feel that Garrison and Phillips, the twin warriors, the great white brothers, are riding at our side.

The anti-slavery cause was only one branch of a movement that embraces the world and reaches through all time. It is the triumphant progress of democracy—the movement of the common people to take possession of their own. Phillips was never narrow enough to have his heart bound up with one race only. He was too true a soldier to sit down content with any partial triumph. When the Anti-slavery Society disbanded in 1870, his last words to his companions were: "We sheathe no sword. We only turn our front upon a new foe." Looking out over Christendom he saw, as he said, "that out of some three hundred or four hundred millions, at least one hundred millions never had enough to eat." He saw the wealth of the world in the hands of comparatively few, and he saw that this wealth had been created not by the few, but by the toil of the many. With brave, unflinching logic he announced his principle, "Labor, the creator of wealth, is entitled to all it creates," and avowed himself willing to follow it to

its ultimate conclusion, to the utter abolition of the wage system, and the substitution, for cut-throat competition, of a fair and just coöperation. He had begun his study of the labor question as early as 1861 or 1862, when no journal except the anti-slavery papers would give an inch of space to its discussion. But in 1871 the workingmen of Massachusetts had formed a party and invited him to be their candidate for governor. He consented, not because he wished or was willing to be elected, if that had been possible, but only to advance the agitation. To the laboring men he gave this characteristic advice: "Write on your ballot boxes, 'We never forget. If you do us a wrong, you may go down on your knees and say I am sorry I did the act, and it may avail you in heaven, but on this side the grave, never!'" And so far as workingmen have succeeded in their political aims, it has been because they have followed that advice.

It would require a separate address to recount his services to other causes. The wrongs of Ireland claimed his voice; the wrongs of the Indian, the Chinaman, the Jew. He spoke for the temperance movement, woman suffrage, prison reform, the abolition of the gallows. He taught race prejudice its most wholesome lesson in his lecture on the great San Domingo black, "the soldier, the statesman, the martyr," Toussaint L'Ouverture; he gave religious bigotry its most stinging rebuke in his Daniel O'Connell; he brought religion itself to its most vital test

in Christianity a Battle, Not a Dream; and in 1881, in the most finished effort of his life, his great Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, he arraigned the timid scholarship of his time for having been a clog on the wheels of reform, and turned respectability pale by showing it that the Nihilists were only the Washingtons and Warrens, the Patrick Henrys and Sam Adamses of Russia. In the last fifteen years of his life he fulfilled more perfectly than any other American his own definition of the agitator. "The agitator," said he, "must stand outside of organizations, with no bread to earn, no candidate to elect, no party to save, no object but the truth—to tear a question open and riddle it with light."

If he were living today how he would rejoice over those six stars in the suffrage banner—six states that have risen above the bigotry of sex. How he would be fighting for the initiative and referendum and overthrowing every argument against them, arguments that have no foundation save in the old Tory distrust of the people. We have not begun to come up with Wendell Phillips, but such achievements are signs that we are on his trail. He was a prophet even in the matter of mechanics. Addressing the school children of Boston in 1865, he said: "We have invented the telegraph. But what of that? If I live forty years I expect to see a telegraph that will send messages without wires and both ways at the same time." It gives one a weird feeling to remember that

it was almost exactly forty years from that date that Marconi's wonderful invention was given to the world. Radical, progressive, as he was, never satisfied with what had been attained, he had yet the poet's reverence for the past. How fond he was of quoting those words:

> "The great of old,
> The dead but sceptered sovereigns who still rule
> Our spirits from their urns."

His lecture on Lost Arts, prepared on the spur of the moment, but repeated over two thousand times, is as fine a tribute as was ever paid to the forgotten genius of antiquity. He sympathized with every attempt to save for future ages "the places where bold men spoke or brave men died." He plead in vain for the preservation of the Hancock House. He plead, not in vain, for the preservation of the Old South. Its dark walls stand today a proof and trophy of his eloquence.

To read his speeches you would say they must have come flaming from the furnace. You seem to hear the lion roar of Mirabeau and picture to yourself the stormy action of Demosthenes. Yet his voice at its loudest was like a silver clarion, and oftener would remind you of a flute, while his action was at all times the grace of a Greek god. Higginson said: "No matter how humble the client he represented, he always had the air of the grand seigneur." He really introduced a new style in oratory. He made the old

bombast ridiculous. Such rantings put you in mind of savages who beat tom-toms and yell and screech to appall their enemies; but Phillips reminded you of the Spartan heroes, who marched, as Milton said,

> "to the Dorian strain
> Of flutes and soft recorders,"

going forth smiling and crowned with roses to those deadly combats from which it was their point of honor never to retreat. A Southerner who listened to him in the old days, expecting to hear a noisy demagogue, could only describe him as "an infernal machine set to music."

Severest of all the public speakers of his time, he carried in his bosom the tenderest of hearts.

> "For all the lost and desolate
> Woman and man revile,
> Saint Francis at the cloister gate
> Had not so sweet a smile."

How close he kept to the people! Lived for forty years down there on Essex Street, and when the city tore down his house and ran the pavement over its ruins, moved over to Common Street, to a house as near like the old one as he could find. Born on Beacon Hill, died in Common Street—that seems to tell the story of the man. In the morning, when it was possible, he would go to the Criminal Courts to lend his hand to some poor outcast falsely accused or honestly desiring to do better. One night he was

accosted by a woman of the street here on the Common Mall. Looking in his pure face she saw her mistake and apologized. Mr. Phillips drew her on to talk, walked back and forth with her under the elms until he had her story, then took her to a home where she became the woman God intended her to be.

"Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!"

If we had a right to draw aside the curtain that hides his home life, what an example of chivalrous devotion would be brought to view!—devotion not without its rich reward, since from the seclusion of that sick chamber came the highest inspiration to heroic words and deeds.

Not many men deserve to be remembered on their hundredth birthday; but Wendell Phillips's second centennial may be better observed than his first. We may be sure his name will be written higher a hundred years hence than it is today. When the reforms he advocated have become accomplished facts, when prisons have been turned into moral hospitals, when society has learned to erect "a guidepost at the beginning of the road instead of a gallows at the end of it," when cities have sloughed off the grogshop and the brothel, when woman has been summoned into civil life and has become the yokefellow of man, no longer his plaything or his drudge, when the hands that create the wealth of the world have learned to hold it and to handle it for the good of all, and every

child born in America has an equal chance in life, when the dark-browed multitudes for whom he toiled and suffered have joined the enfranchised millions that are yet to trample all oppression under their feet—do you think that in that day the name of Wendell Phillips is likely to be forgotten? Whatever we may say, do you imagine it will be the judgment of coming times that he condemned the tyrants of his own age too severely?

The word of the Lord came to Wendell Phillips, as to the prophets in all ages, "Cry aloud and spare not!" Thank God, he did not spare! Thank God for every bitter, biting, blasting speech that woke a sluggard land to its duty and made the ears of recreant statesmen tingle with shame! Would that in this day another might arise like unto him, so gifted, so consecrated, so fearless, so mighty in the power of the Spirit, to rebuke the cowards and oppressors of our time. Wrong still walks the earth, the expectation of the poor perishes, and the needy are forgotten. Oh that he himself were here to defend the mighty bulwarks of liberty he labored to build up within the Constitution! Oh that he were here to shame his own race into honest dealing with the black—to lay open to scorn the sneaking cowardice that makes laws to give white ignorance and vice the ballot and deny it to the black, not daring to meet its rival in the open field and lay down one equal test for all, but skulking behind "grandfather clauses," while it taxes the black

man for parks and libraries and shuts him out from both! Oh that he were here to damn as it deserves the hellish hatred that, North as well as South, condemns men unheard because they are black, tortures innocent and guilty at the stake, yes, even in the Quaker commonwealth, drags the wounded black boy from the hospital on his pallet and burns him in his blood—the shameless perjury that acquits the lynchers, the brazen impudence that finds unwritten law to clear cold-blooded murder with the sanction of the court! Oh that he were here to find some fitting name for states that, pretending to be democratic, hold seats in Congress for millions of men whose political rights they have villainously filched away, voting now, not as in old days for three-fifths of the Negroes, but for all! He should be here to pour contempt upon communities that let the hands of infants do their work, rob the schoolhouse and the playfield to run the factory, and do not wince when they

> "Hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
> Ere the sorrow comes with years,"—

the sodden dullness that suffers greed and cunning to strike hands and tax the bread and meat, the coal and clothing of millions to fill the pockets of a few—the purblind prejudice that still holds woman back from her part in civic life while it leaves the grogshop and the brothel free to rot the heart out of great cities! Oh that he would come and unfrock those time-serv-

ing priests that have no word for the giant iniquities of their day, dumb dogs that will not bark when the thief is climbing into the fold! Would that he could wield once more the fearful lash that made bribed statesmen cringe and tremble and the backs of apostate judges smart under their robes! But not to rebuke only—would that he were with us now to cheer and lead! One blast upon that silver bugle would be worth a hundred men. The battle has moved onward; there are fighters in the field. It is not an hour for curse or lamentation. It is an hour for the consecration of knighthood, for vigil, and for vow. We do not come to praise you, Wendell Phillips; you have received already your eternal great reward. We have come to catch the glow of your great spirit and resolve to make our lives like yours. Here, where a century ago your life began, we are gathered to celebrate your coming with deep thanksgiving and with solemn joy, pledging ourselves anew to the grand purpose to which your life was devoted—a war against all oppression, for the liberty of all!

WENDELL PHILLIPS

Teach me, dread boughs,
Where from your twigs the sad Muse culls her leaves,
When she a long-neglected garland weaves,
To bind great brows.

Give no leaf less
Than his unlaureled temples should have worn:
So may his spirit pass me not in scorn,
But turn and bless.

I fondly dream!
How could my crown, though rich with crust and stain
From tears of sacred sorrow, win such gain—
That smile supreme?

Short-stemmed and curt
His wreath should be, and braided by strong hands,
Hindered with sword-hilt, while the braider stands
With loin upgirt.

Too late to urge
Thy tardy crown. Draw back, O Northern blond!
Let black hands take to bind the Southern frond,
A severed scourge!

Haughty and high,
And deaf to all the thunders of the throng,
He heard the lowest whisper of his wrong
The slave could sigh.

In some pent street,
O prophet-slaying city of his care,
Pour out thine eyes, loose thy repentant hair,
And kiss his feet!

Little it is
That thou canst pay, yet pay this recompense:
All tongues henceforth shall give thine ears offence
Remembering his:

All grace shall tease
The flush of shame to thine averted cheek;
Best Greek shall mind thee of one greater Greek,
More godlike ease—

Blessing and blight,
A bitter drop beneath the bee-kissed lips,
Hyperion's anger passing to eclipse
And arrow-flight!

Thou didst not spare:
Thy foot is on his violated door;
Therefore the mantle that his shoulders wore
None hence shall wear.

Above thy choice,
This Coriolanus of the people's wars
Could never strip his brawn and show his scars
To beg thy voice.

Struck by death's dart
(In all the strain of conflict unconfessed),
He carried through the years that wounded breast,
That poignant heart.

Last from the fight,
So moves the lion, with unhasting stride,
Dragging the slant spear, broken in his side—
And gains the height!

Wendell Phillips Centenary

1811–1911

WENDELL PHILLIPS

Born November 29, 1811
Died February 2, 1884

He stood upon the world's broad threshold: wide
The din of battle and of slaughter rose;
He saw God stand upon the weaker side,
That sank in seeming loss before its foes:
Many there were who made great haste and sold
Unto the cunning enemy their swords,
He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,
And, underneath their soft and flowery words,
Heard the cold serpent hiss: therefore he went
And humbly joined him to the weaker part,
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So he could be the nearer to God's heart,
And feel its solemn pulses sending blood
Through all the widespread veins of endless good.

J. R. Lowell, 1845

THERE, with one hand behind his back,
Stands Phillips, buttoned in a sack,
Our Attic orator, our Chatham:
Old fogies, when he lightens at 'em,
Shrivel like leaves; to him 'tis granted
Always to say the word that's wanted,
So that he seems but speaking clearer
The tiptoe thought of every hearer:
Each flash his brooding heart lets fall
Fires what's combustible in all,
And sends the applauses bursting in
Like an exploded magazine.
His eloquence no frothy show,
The gutter's street-polluted flow,
No Mississippi's yellow flood
Whose shoalness can't be seen for mud:—
So simply clear, serenely deep,
So silent-strong its graceful sweep,
None measures its unrippling force
Who has not striven to stem its course:
How fare their barques who think to play
With smooth Niagara's mane of spray,
Let Austin's total shipwreck say.

J. R. Lowell, 1846

WENDELL PHILLIPS
From a photograph about 1865

WENDELL PHILLIPS was born in the brick mansion built by his father, John Phillips (first Mayor of Boston), on the lower corner of Walnut and Beacon Streets, overlooking Boston Common. After his father's death (1823) he and his mother resided for some years in a dwelling house on the site of the Athenæum, between Beacon Street and the Old Granary Burying Ground.

"He was a thorough Bostonian, too, and his anti-slavery enthusiasm never rose quite so high as when blended with local patriotism. No one who heard it can ever forget the thrilling modulation of his voice when he said, at some special crisis of the anti-slavery agitation,—

"'I love inexpressibly these streets of Boston, over whose pavements my mother held up tenderly my baby feet; and if God grants me time enough, I will make them too pure to bear the footsteps of a slave!'"

T. W. Higginson

BIRTHPLACE OF WENDELL PHILLIPS

From an etching by J. Andrews, 1845

From a knife-cut portrait made in London in 1839

THEN began an agitation which for the marvel of its origin, the majesty of its purpose, the earnestness, unselfishness, and ability of its appeals, the vigor of its assault, the deep, national convulsion it caused, the vast and beneficent changes it wrought, and its widespread, indirect influence on all kindred moral questions, is without a parallel in history since Luther.

WENDELL PHILLIPS, at Garrison's funeral, 1879

I claim for the anti-slavery movement that, looking back over its whole course, and considering the men connected with it in the mass, it has been marked by sound judgment, unerring foresight, the most sagacious adaptation of means to ends, the strictest self-discipline, the most thorough research, and an amount of patient and manly argument addressed to the conscience and intellect of the nation, such as no other cause of the kind, in England or this country, has ever offered.

WENDELL PHILLIPS, 1853

(George Thompson, the eloquent English ally of the American abolitionists, thrice visited the United States, in 1834, 1851, and 1864, and was hotly mobbed during his first two visits. On his third visit he witnessed the abolition of slavery and was publicly honored for his unselfish labours.)

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, GEORGE THOMPSON, and WENDELL PHILLIPS
From a daguerreotype taken in 1851

NONE know what it is to live till they redeem life from its seeming monotony by laying it a sacrifice on the altar of some great cause.

The agitator must stand outside of organization, with no bread to earn, no candidate to elect, no party to save, no object but the truth, — to tear a question open and riddle it with light.

Power, ability, influence, character, virtue, are only trusts with which to serve our time.

The broadest and most far-sighted intellect is utterly unable to foresee the ultimate consequences of any great social change. Ask yourself, on all such occasions, if there be any element of right and wrong in the question, any principle of clear, natural justice that turns the scale. If so, take your part with the perfect and abstract right, and trust God to see that it shall prove the expedient.

WENDELL PHILLIPS

WENDELL PHILLIPS

From a photograph by [illegible] Black, [illegible]

TO be as good as our fathers we must be better.

We must never allow the siren voice of our tastes to drown the cry of another's necessities.

It is safe to leave man with all the rights God gave him.

Labor, the creator of wealth, is entitled to all it creates. Before the movement stops, every child born in America must have an equal chance in life.

While woman is admitted to the gallows, the jail, and the tax list, we have no right to debar her from the ballot box.

Genius can mould no marble so speaking as the spot where a brave man stood or the scene where he labored.

WENDELL PHILLIPS

WENDELL PHILLIPS

From a photograph by Sarony, about 1850

– Count that day lost – whose low descending sun
sees at thy hand no worthy action done –

This completes John Brown
taught to each of his children –

Wm Odell Phillips

Boston Apl 8. 1860 –

HERE
WENDELL PHILLIPS RESIDED DURING FORTY YEARS,
DEVOTED BY HIM TO EFFORTS TO SECURE
THE ABOLITION OF AFRICAN SLAVERY IN THIS COUNTRY.

THE CHARMS OF HOME, THE ENJOYMENT OF WEALTH AND LEARNING,
EVEN THE KINDLY RECOGNITION OF HIS FELLOW CITIZENS,
WERE BY HIM ACCOUNTED AS NAUGHT COMPARED WITH DUTY.

HE LIVED TO SEE JUSTICE TRIUMPHANT, FREEDOM UNIVERSAL,
AND TO RECEIVE THE TARDY PRAISES OF HIS FORMER OPPONENTS.
THE BLESSINGS OF THE POOR, THE FRIENDLESS, AND THE OPPRESSED ENRICHED HIM.

IN BOSTON
HE WAS BORN 29 NOVEMBER, 1811, AND DIED 2 FEBRUARY, 1884.

This Tablet was Erected in 1894, by Order of the City Council of Boston.

Tablet on site of Essex Street house

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